



Transportation

Background

The 2001 Nisqually earthquake severely damaged the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and transportation planners have warned the Legislature that a similar event could bring it crashing to the ground. As if that weren't enough, the 520 floating bridge across Lake Washington is also in danger of structural collapse.

Dozens of other bridges and roadways around the state are in need of repair. Even in this mild winter, our main east-west mountain pass was closed several times because of avalanches and heavy snowfall. Rural two-lane highways remain some of our state's most dangerous roads. All of these dangerous and congested roadways will only get worse with the passage of time and the cost to repair them will only increase.

In 2003, the Legislature adopted the Nickel Package, which is funding the construction of transportation projects statewide. The projects are funded from start to finish, and in nearly every case, work is progressing on time and on budget. However, the package could not pay for some of the largest projects, and many other priorities remained unfunded.

Solutions

This year, the Legislature approved a transportation package that focuses on public safety, economic development and solving the worst traffic bottlenecks. In this bipartisan, 16-year plan, some projects will be funded from start to finish, just as in the 2003 Nickel Package. Many of the largest and most important public safety projects will be completed in partnership with local or regional entities. Taxpayers need to know their dollars are being spent wisely, so the Legislature built in strict accountability measures, including independent performance audits.

Business leaders supported this plan because they know the future of the state is riding on our highways. We must make these investments to help get people to and from work more quickly and move products in and out of our deepwater ports. With this package, the Legislature is investing in the prosperity of our communities.

Session Victories

Transportation budget – Senate Bill 6091

The Legislature's 16-year transportation spending plan funds more than 300 highway, bridge and intersection improvements in every county in the state. The plan includes major contributions for the largest public safety and traffic relief projects in central Puget Sound: \$2 billion for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, \$500 million for the 520 bridge and \$992 million for

Interstate 405. Voters will need to step forward to approve a regional transportation package that contributes the remaining funds for the largest projects. The plan also includes \$51 million a year for freight rail, passenger rail, bus service, park and ride lots, and other proven strategies that take vehicles off the road.

The budget funds major projects in other communities across the state, including:

- \$771 million for Interstate 5, state Route 167 and other projects in Pierce County;
- \$152 million toward the completion of U.S. Highway 395 in Spokane (the North-South Freeway);
- \$261 million for I-5, Interstate 205 and other projects in Clark County;
- \$387 million for Interstate 90 just east of Snoqualmie Pass;
- \$162 million for the new Hood Canal bridge; and
- \$56 million for U.S. Highway 12 improvements in Walla Walla County.

Cities and counties will also receive \$38 million a year in gas tax funds for local road and street improvements. The funds will be used to fill potholes, reduce traffic congestion, improve road safety in rural areas, and to fulfill other priorities of local governments.

Transportation revenues – Senate Bill 6103

The transportation budget will be financed through a 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax phased in over the next four years, as well as small annual weight fees on passenger vehicles.

In 2005, the gas tax will increase 3 cents; in 2006, the increase will be 3 cents; in 2007, the increase is 2 cents; and in 2008, 1.5 cents. All increases occur at the first of the fiscal year (July 1). This year's gas tax increase will cost a driver who travels 15,000 miles a year at 25 miles per gallon an additional \$1.50 a month. When the full 9.5 cent increase is in place, the cost to that same driver will be \$4.75 a month. The state constitution requires that all gas tax funds be used for the state's highway system.

The current \$30 car tab fees for passenger vehicles and light trucks are augmented by small annual weight fees. Owners of most passenger cars, vehicles weighing up to 4,000 pounds, will pay \$10 more. Owners of vehicles weighing 4,000 to 6,000 pounds, such as full-size pickups, will pay \$20 more annually. Drivers of the largest SUVs, weighing 6,000 to 8,000 pounds, will pay an additional \$30 a year. Vehicles weighing more than 8,000 pounds will pay the weight fees already established under the commercial weight fee schedules. Motor homes will not be subject to weight fees, but will pay an annual flat fee of \$75. The fee for light utility trailers weighing less than 2,000 pounds will drop from \$30 to \$15 per year.

The Senate plan establishes even more strict accountability provisions to reassure the taxpayers that the projects will be completed on time and within budget. Within one year, the Transportation Performance Audit Board (TPAB), a group of citizens with private sector transportation expertise, will submit to the Legislature a process to conduct performance audits of each of the projects. Also, the bill provides \$4 million that the elected state auditor will use to contract out with independent performance auditors, who will continue to review the projects to make sure they are on time and on budget.